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Nixon's assertions raise questions about briefing

Allen Dulles, former chief of the Central Intelligence Agency, has disposed fairly well of former Vice President Nixon's charge that during the presidential campaign President Kennedy irresponsibly misused secret information about Cuba provided during two official CIA briefings on international affairs.

Mr. Dulles, as the man who conducted the briefings, said the President was told nothing about the Eisenhower administration's covert training of anti-Castro refugees for an invasion of Cuba, until after the election. He also acknowledged that his report to the administration might have been misinterpreted to give the impression that this Kennedy briefing prior to the celebrated fourth Kennedy-Nixon debate had included a rundown on the refugee invasion corps.

At the press level then, the dustup raised by Mr. Nixon in his book, *Six Crises*, can be dismissed as "an honest misunderstanding," as Mr. Dulles wrote.

But the broader issues involved in the practice of briefing presidential candidates could not be overlooked. The confusion, which reached the level of Vice President Nixon, about who told what to whom and why at the Kennedy-Dulles meeting suggests the need for clarification of the briefing practice.

There is no formal protocol for such briefings. The concept, like Topsy, just grew, starting in 1944. Then President Roosevelt, fearful that a campaign might disclose that the United States had broken a key Japanese code, decided the

safest course was to make Republican candidate Thomas Dewey privy to that secret, and other war information.

The practice has been repeated in each subsequent presidential election because of the Cold War that has linked national security inextricably with foreign policy.

Yet the fact that President Kennedy was uninformed about the covert Cuban operation indicates that the purpose of the briefings has been altered and their value reduced. It would appear that Mr. Dulles was concerned with acquainting Mr. Kennedy solely with situations in foreign countries and not on American foreign policy to meet those situations.

There may have been reasons for this limitation. Certainly, a candidate thoroughly opposed to administration foreign policy might wish to remain ignorant of secret policy information in order to be free to criticize. Or an incumbent President might feel that the major opposition party was so fundamentally at odds with his policies that the briefings should be restricted.

For whatever the reasons, the limitations on the briefing should be made clear, to insure that a candidate is not mistakenly assumed to be speaking from a background of knowledge on official policy that he actually does not possess. Further, liaison needs to be tightened to prevent misunderstandings like the Nixon-Kennedy exchange.

But to be meaningful in terms of national security, to protect the inadvertent slip damaging to the United States cause in the Cold War, it would seem that the briefings should be designed to take the candidate of a major party into full confidence.

The procedure need not be formalized because too many unknown factors are involved. Common sense, including a prudent concern for national security, should be the primary guide. But if politics in the United States is to continue to end at the water's edge, a full and complete briefing